

# **UC Santa Barbara**

## **becoming undisciplined**

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# becoming undisciplined

*a zine*



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*a zine*

edited by the becoming undisciplined collective

**becoming undisciplined: a zine**

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becoming undisciplined collective

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## introduction

This project emerged as a conversation between friends. Struck by Christina Sharpe's call to become undisciplined, we wanted to learn from the genealogy of Black radical thinkers who have long described the ways that oppressive social arrangements are a problem of knowledge itself. We wanted to give ourselves space to think through what becoming undisciplined might mean for us and might offer to us, how undiscipline is located not just in our intellectual and emotional practices, but in our bodies: in the ways they can be unruly and in excess, in the ways that we refuse for them to be used. We discussed finding practices for how we might live in our bodies beyond the prescriptions placed on them by anti-Blackness, heteronormativity, transphobia, and misogynoir. And while it is not always safe or possible to exist in such a way, we find it urgent to build and protect worlds where such existence is affirmed.

For us, becoming signals movement, flux, fugitivity. Becoming is approaching, maybe even arriving at, forms of undiscipline that elude knowability and expressibility. Becoming is not being with finality, but is being with activity, change, dis/continuity. Becoming is being trained in the ways of the academy while attempting to challenge, navigate, and survive its violent past, present, and future. Becoming is learning and implementing strategies for living differently, whether they be refusal, critical disinterest, care or intimacy. Becoming gestures toward our aim to not necessarily find hard answers to our questions, but rather to be moved by the ideas they generate.

These conversations unfolded in our living rooms, backyards, and conference roundtables; through email threads and facebook messages and skype sessions. We reflected on the significance of our bodies in time and space—what it might mean to be, as Black graduate students, in the process of being disciplined into fields of knowledge and oriented towards futures that are antithetical to the liberated futures we desire. We were curious about the limitations and contradictions of learning, teaching, and producing knowledge while brushing up against epistemological traditions rooted in colonialism and racism, asking ourselves, as Ashon Crawley does “how can we be in the university as a fundamental antagonism that is not immediately captured in the logics of its enclosure, the logics of diversification and disciplinarity?”<sup>1</sup>

We discussed what might be required of us, ethically and politically, if we are to locate ourselves in an institution that seeks to absorb the radical impulses of certain (inter)disciplines that emerged from collective struggles for liberation and refurbish them as earnest attempts at diversity and inclusion, all the while engaging in exploitative labor practices against adjunct faculty and service workers, encroachments on indigenous sovereignty, and investments which bolster prison and military power. The moment we write this, like many moments, is one in which many peoples' lives have been made unlivable by the terror of racist and xenophobic violence, heteropatriarchy, extractive capitalism, and climate chaos. Thus, at the root of this project is a yearning for knowledge of a more livable world.

*becoming undisciplined* was conceptualized as a zine to emphasize the theorizing that occurs in “forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic,” as Barbara Christian writes in “A Race for Theory.”<sup>2</sup> She emphasizes the theorizing of people of color, specifically women of color, that occurred in narrative forms, in riddles and proverbs that “unmasked the power relations of their world.”<sup>3</sup> We look not only to Christian but to Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, who in *Ezili's Mirrors* recognizes that standard academic discourse does not suffice to understand or explore Black queer creative genders, and instead engages in a “deliberate heaping of disparate things together” to honor and reflect Vodou epistemology and the logic of Erzulie. We look to the Black poets, artists, and musicians whose work has held us, to the visual albums and emotion pictures offered right when we needed them, and to the dog-eared pages of our favorite poetry collections.

We too sought a format that would allow room for theorizing in these various modes—in poetry, in painting, in proverb—about experiences of being Black in relation to the university. We recognize that the language we are often encouraged to use as graduate students is not always adequate for these expressions, and we have sought to create an avenue that validates and values ways of communicating that are not shaped by the need to be legible in or to the academy, with the wish that such a refusal of intelligibility might make relationality more possible. We aim for this zine to not only open up lines of inquiry into what the university does to us—physically, intellectually, emotionally—but to be a space of affirmation and affective release, a place to vent or scream or cry or laugh or think in whatever form feels right.

Lastly, a central part of these conversations has been being open and real about the impact that graduate school can have on the mental health and wellbeing of Black graduate students and dreaming up ways to keep ourselves and each other well. We imagined this project, in both its process and product, as a means to heal, find each other, care for each other, and get through. The pieces in this collection include poetry, prose, essays, and visual art by Black graduate students whose contributions offer rumination on language, pleasure, care, place, and survival. The works in this zine attempt to bring language to what we know, what we feel, and what our bodies insist is true.



We want to say thank you to all of the contributors for being a part of this little project. Thank you Mireille Miller-Young for your encouragement and guidance. Thank you Sherri Barnes for helping us explore open-access publishing options for this zine. Thank you Christina Sharpe for the beautifully illustrative and informative wake work that inspired the collective independent study from which this project emerged. Thank you to the myriad Black activists, artists, writers, and others creating roadmaps to more undisciplined futures. And thank you to everyone who takes time out of their day to explore this zine.

*becoming undisciplined collective*

#### **Notes**

- 1 Ashon Crawley, "Introduction to the Academy and What Can Be Done?," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 12.
- 2 Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique* 6, no. Spring (1987): 52.
- 3 Same as above.

## a collective independent study

This independent study is inspired by Christina Sharpe’s call for Black scholars to “become undisciplined,” given that academic legibility often requires being “disciplined into thinking through and along lines that reinscribe our own annihilation” (*In the Wake*, 13). For students who are Black, queer, trans, and/or women, it is crucial to find ways to resist being disciplined by and oriented toward forms of knowledge production that reproduce epistemic violence. Instead we are interested in how to read, write, and teach in ways that are in excess of the disciplinary tools that the university insists upon. Our hope is that engagement with the texts in this syllabus will help us develop strategies to refuse legibility, pursue decolonial and liberatory theories/praxes, and affirm Black life and pleasure—both within and without the university.

A few areas we hope to engage are:

**Black non/being and Black study:**

Black and Black-affirming theory and methodology  
Afro-pessimism both/and/or Black optimism  
posthumanism

**Black queer feminist futures:**

how queer, trans, and gender help construct Black non/being  
accessing the (ongoing) past to approach liberatory futures

**scholarship and refusal:**

intellectual genealogies, citational politics, (non)academic home places  
avoiding the sunken place and traps of professionalization in academia  
decolonizing methodologies and theories

### Appreciations

While not an “assignment” in the traditional sense, we hope to build a practice of appreciation and critical generosity by sending postcards or other notes to some of the scholars whose work we are inspired by. We believe kindness is a crucial part of scholarly practice—both for its own sake and to counter the harmful forms of competition that the academy actively fosters among scholars and students.

### becoming undisciplined

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We must become  
undisciplined.

Christina Sharpe

## Tongues

Alex Cunningham

My freedom lies in tongue—in mouths that know multiple versions of me;  
 in lips whose lust to watch me stuck, went mute and dry. I, rather, went high.  
 Some tongues even became as flexible and desirous as I.  
 We yearned to reach each other. To cu...m... eye to eye;  
 to recognize our growth, call it gifts-in-kind.

The rules of theory are useless for this moment that is more wonder and magic than sociological inquiry prefers to touch. It is an individual crisis of a loss of self, remedied only by exploring a forbidden experience—movement— to bodies marked as non-autonomous. Common words fail to describe this time, so the universe is my diary as I conjure the day my glow became eternal. I allowed myself—a Black girl too grown for far too long—pleasure. Through moving to a new tongue, I emerged in to my good sense and left my academic nonsense. What might it mean to experience release? To desire sustained affirmation from myself, not for my struggles or accolades, but for my presence? I answered on my knees, among women, in the darkness. I called sweetly and curiously to the erotic, opening wide to delight in our ceremonious union.

Patient tongues and slick moves awaited my journey to elevated consciousness.  
 My requirement is to tame the wild ones that speak over me, ignoring my needs. Be loud.  
 Closing my eyes and finding a newer groove, I re-teach this tongue and I am proud.  
 For the ones that cannot learn to find me and speak anew,  
 our time ticks rapidly from hello to a final adieu.

On that first cool Monday's eve, I was overdressed and nervous. Not ready to be unmade and certainly not prepared to emerge as something else. My hour's dive yielded many a fruitful lesson with the most resonant teaching being letting go. Rather than searching to pull myself up from a mess of thoughts of inadequacy, GPAs and awards, I left that shit. Grinding slowly against my mat with arms supporting my bends, I opened up to the possibility that I lack the words to call all of me right here. I live in the spring's healing love, the summertime magic, that it's wintertime cold, so shawty fall thru desire. Down to the way my body shakes, I lack the words of affirmation, tenderness, awe and presence to ever fully call all of me. So, I dance!

Moan. Touch. Breathe. Exhale. Imagine. Chant. Meditate. Write. Moan.  
 What was once absurdity to perform is now an exercise in pleasure and affirmation.  
 To love this body, aura, presence, spirit, I am defying centuries of tongues.  
 Violent, colonialist, sexist, exploitative, hating-ass, never pleasing me non-senses.  
 Foregrounding *my* senses let me talk different—to taste new possibilities of who I might be.

My freedom lies in tongue—in mouths that know multiple versions of me;  
on lips whose love and labor convinced me to journey to ecstasy...  
to no-rules me.

Some tongues became as flexible as I. We can now reach other on multiple vibes,  
focusing on sustained affirmation from us—for us, *all of us*—knowing pleasure is our presence.

Àse! Àse! Grace to the ancestors for showing me joy.

Breathing underwater. Moving sensually. Writing creatively. My tools of life.  
I discover and experience myself more robustly equipped to talk about the ride.  
Meditating and gravitating towards whatever freedom for this moment can ever be.  
Àse! Àse! to teaching an old tongue a newer way to cultivate her peace.



# The Whisper Campaign of Academic Trauma

Ciarra Jones

*If you are silent about your pain,  
they will kill you and say you enjoyed it.*

— Zora Neale Hurston

“I read your article. I loved it, but you can’t say things like that.”

“If you talk about your pain and challenge academic structures, your professors won’t write you letters of recommendations.”

“I am in pain too, but I just could never do what you did. I’m trying to get a PhD and I need to play politics to receive my degree.”

These are just some of the many things said to me after my [article](#) “Gradschool is Trash for Students of Color and We Should Talk about That” went viral.<sup>1</sup> From this, I learned that the number one rule for people of color in the academy is to *never* publicly acknowledge your pain.

What those who said this did not know is that I already felt fear concerning the virality of my piece, and as a result, their commentary served to compound and authenticate my anxious thoughts. The days after my article when viral, I found myself hiding under the covers of my bed, panicked about the ways in which my very private pain was suddenly visible, and terrified both of the public response and institutional backlash.

Though I felt pride that my words provided solace to a little corner of the internet, I also felt deep shame. Black and Brown students are consistently taught to be grateful for a chance to receive a seat at the table—even if that table is wobbly and built on unsteady ground. And so I felt, in a deep, insidious, and colonial way, that I forgot my place, I forgot to be thankful. The guilt of this transgression proved to be overwhelming.

This shame was deepened everytime I ran across a student of color who commented on the “reckless” nature of my work. Over and over again I was told that to properly leverage my degree I could not under any circumstance acknowledge my pain. For

every three students of color that told me to keep writing and sharing my truth, there was one who would say, “I am scared for you.”

And so, I became scared for myself. I wanted to be a good student, and good students do not question the status quo.

One day, after listening to a lot of Brené Brown, I began to meditate on the problematic and disheartening conversations I had with certain students of color. During an appearance on the “On Being” podcast, Brown talks about the difficulty of *true belonging*. She defines *true belonging* as a “practice that requires us to be vulnerable and learn how to be present with people — without sacrificing who we are.” Brown constantly reminds her readers and listeners that *true belonging* requires a sacrifice of comfort, not of the self.

When we lean into our own authenticity, many of the spaces that we frequent begin to come up short; once we recognize the vast beauty of ourselves, so many spaces are no longer enough because they fail to care for us in our fullness. For many, the academy is often one of these insufficient spaces, and for many Black and Brown students, this truth is incredibly painful. This is due to fact that receiving entrance into the academy validates our exceptionalism and grant us privilege and access to opportunities that we would otherwise be barred from. If we are not intentional about cultivating self-love, academic institutions can shift from a conduit to reach our goals into the place where we derive self-meaning, and this, the fallacy that the academy is our identity, constitutes a very dangerous chain of thought.

Because if the academy is not enough, and we have made the academy our identity, our source of self, and our well of worthiness, then who are we when these institutions fall short of loving us? If my degree is meant to be a sign of my self-worth and exceptionalism, but I must dim the parts of me that make me exceptional in order to receive it, does it have meaning?

Brown’s words catalyzed an epiphany: the fear, anxiety, and guilt that I felt was not *mine*.

The fear and anxiety I carried was projected onto me by other students of color and is ultimately representative of the larger lies that academic institutions tell students of color, and the untruths that we tell ourselves.

The “Whisper Campaign of Academic Trauma” refers to the ways in which students of color are taught to internalize their own pain not a sign of dehumanizing systems, but as a sign of personal deficiency. In lieu of looking for the external causes of their anxiety and depression, students of color are gaslighted into believing that institutions are acting correctly and that it is the students of color who are too combative, too hard to please, too resistant, and ultimately not cut out for academia. The Whisper Campaign normalizes trauma and relegates criticism, critique, and emotional well-being to the corners.

And so, as a protective mechanism we hide our pain, we shelter our truth, and we demonize, ostracize, and “other” our own trauma. We do this because it is better than having our feelings continuously invalidated. However, pain can never truly be withheld, it can be repressed, shifted, rerouted, but it is always there, it is always present, and it begs for us to acknowledge it, to nurture it, to heal from it.

As we repress our own pain, we begin to inadvertently project our repression onto others. We tell other students of color that they should not speak out, partly to protect them from our similar rejection and partly to save ourselves from having to excavate our own trauma. Watching someone live their truth can be incredibly uncomfortable if we are refusing to recognize our own.

This internalization, repression, and “othering” is a result of a single a lie, a lie that says feeling our pain and engaging with our academic trauma undermines our scholastic prowess and viability.

By choosing to sit in the tension of my truths, I rejected the internalization of my trauma. Internalizing says its *either/or*, acceptance says it is *both/and*. For me, my master’s program constitutes some of my highest highs and my lowest lows. There are days when attending school is violent and harmful. Instead of turning inward and blaming myself when this occurs, I intentionally remind myself that challenging my program does not make me ungrateful, on the contrary, it elucidates just how deeply I care for my colleagues and for my institution.

Conversely there are days and even weeks when I deeply, deeply enjoy my education, when I am inspired by my colleagues and professors, and when my path is illuminated before me. And I know, without a doubt, that those joys will only deepen as I continue to discern where within my institution I am best cared for and as a result, can provide reciprocal care for others.

To those who suggested that I cease telling my truth in order to preserve a false sense of belonging, I say that your logic is flawed. The academy fails daily to be my place of true-belonging, it fails to be the place where I can bring my full self into the door and feel validated. Stratifying our identities in order to be received should not be normalized. I am not wrong for calling out systems that dehumanize and devalue my humanity, even if I lose opportunity as a result. That opportunity is already dead if it requires that I prune myself for entry.

Never feel ashamed for pushing the arms of your program outward to ensure they are wide enough to envelope the wholeness of your humanity—you deserve nothing less.

## Notes

- 1 Jones, Ciarra. 2017. “Grad School Is Trash for Students of Color and We Should Talk About That.” *Medium Student Voices*. November 28, 2017. <https://mystudentvoices.com/grad-school-is-trash-for-students-of-color-and-we-should-talk-about-that-af672814b3ee>.

## Misbehaving to Make Space

Lauren Williams

Black folks at art and design schools seem to be relegated to a narrow, uncomfortable interstitial space: We're either the Black person unwillingly rendered token; the angry, Black pariah who won't shut up about being Black; or the Black person keeping their head down and minding their business to make it out as quickly and as unscathed as possible. By the time we leave this place, we've probably been all three, and every point on that spectrum is pretty limiting.

I'm a designer, researcher, and writer who works with visual and interactive media to understand, critique, and reimagine the ways in which social and economic systems distribute and exercise power. About a year ago, some friends and I started organizing the Antiracist Classroom ([antiracistclassroom.com](http://antiracistclassroom.com)). It's not a class; it's a student-led group whose name offers an indictment of our College. Often, our institution's proximity to industry and role as a creative hub are called on as if they shield us from being obligated to critically examine race and power in the ways we operate. In a sense, what we hoped to achieve with this group, as a first step, was to call attention to this myth of educational neutrality—or more broadly, the fiction of neutrality in art, design, and technology—and the ways in which it allows racism to persist. Beyond highlighting oppressive dimensions of these systems, our intent throughout the past year was to begin envisioning, articulating, and modeling a liberatory future for art and design education and practice. We started organizing the Antiracist Classroom to respond more directly to racism as it presents in our immediate environment. Throughout the previous two terms, we held a series of open forums, a workshop on the College's grievance reporting system, an exhibit of student work and public discussion around microaggressions, and a trip to see Black Panther.

It is, on one level, a rejection of the status quo at Art Center, which holds that commercial design can't critically engage with questions of how power is embedded in form and design choices or the "designer-user" hierarchy. It's an institution where the standard to which we hold our faculty for understanding how to cultivate inclusion and equity in the classroom is set no higher than the notoriously racist industries from which many hail; where racist incidents are turned into "learning opportunities" for aggressors; where it's believed in some circles that critical thought stifles creativity; and where we're told the reason the institution might not acknowledge Black History Month is because it runs the risk of making international students uncomfortable.

The Antiracist Classroom is a space where I can commiserate with Black and non-Black students alike about the pure foolishness of the prospect that acknowledging the historical contributions of Black Americans during a nationally recognized month of remembrance might harm international students rather than enriching their understanding of the historical context that shapes the country in which they've chosen to study and *their place in it*. It's an outlet, a way of taking up space. It's a space where we can just say what it's like to move through our classes and critiques and drawing assignments in our bodies and be believed. It was the naked candor of two Black students baring all about unconscionably racist encounters that led us to start the group in the first place. It's a space where we can manifest the ways of interacting, alternative pedagogies, and environments we dream up that engage with students' whole selves rather than our dissected, un-whole student-selves.

It is almost artfully ironic that within an institution with such expertise in vividly imagining the physical, material, and experiential futures that define the products we consume and the technologies with which we interact, it seems virtually impossible to acknowledge—let alone reimagine—the nature of administrative policies, ways of interacting with students, and other institutional frameworks derived from a deliberately white supremacist imaginary of American higher education, the commercial landscapes into which many graduates matriculate, and corporate workplaces where many faculty members hone their credentials to teach.

Much of my own research—as a student and before—has revolved around understanding how people experience systemic failures or injustices on a personal level: How do Black business owners in the southern United States experience financial stressors that affect their ability to achieve a modicum of economic mobility? How do people make rapid evaluations of trustworthiness in public spaces? How do Black-identifying Mexicans define their identities in a national context that inherently others their afro-descendancy?

My own practice emerges from a place of equal parts deep frustration—a gnawing disappointment with the ways we wield, distribute, and exercise power—and persistent optimism in people's capacity to creatively reimagine and redistribute power in more equitable ways. As the nature of design is necessarily centered on transformation, I am specifically concerned with addressing the myriad ways in which injustice produced or amplified by racism manifests in people's daily lives. That could mean using design to evoke new understandings about how power is wielded or experienced, give form or new framing to critiques of power, or reimagining ways of constructing power altogether. Across the board, my interest surrounds questions about how the systems in which we participate—whether local economies, an institution of higher learning, an entire nation—are experienced and transmuted. Beyond solely designing things that excavate and represent visually or tangibly how people experience systems in which power is imbalanced and racialized, my aim is to identify ways to directly address those systems. These are, of course, issues and realities that resonate with me personally; because of and in spite of who I am and who I'm assumed to be.

At three terms in and with three terms to go, at the exact mid-point of my graduate studies, I was advised by an administrator to stop focusing so much of my research on topics that hold such substantial personal significance.

This appraisal came, oddly enough, on the heels of a project investigating how undergraduate students at my college experience moments of tension with institutional elements of the College. My own predicament quickly spiraled downward into a twisted, un-ironic meta-narrative about conflict within institutional hierarchy: I was told to leave myself out of my work because they found the quality of a project—a project centered on student conflict within an institution of higher learning—to be weak. To be clear, the analysis did need improvement; and that's a welcome critique, a necessary one, albeit one I wished I'd had weeks earlier. But, the substance of the project wasn't critiqued throughout the term; there was no attempt to isolate where its arguments were most anemic and in need of deeper questioning. No demand for finer resolution or pushing me to articulate how the analysis could have been more rigorous. I was simply told, after the fact, first, to behave, and then, to halt that thematic line of inquiry. What began as a conversation about my academic promise and areas for improvement then quickly devolved into a one-sided exchange about my attitude, my rage, my friendships, how I spend my time, and the validity of my academic interests. The warning to "stay focused" even expanded from an admonishment about my research trajectory to a cautioning against my involvement with the Antiracist Classroom: it was framed as a "distraction" from my studies.

These aspects of my self-hood aren't so easily dissectible. Organizing against and amidst racism within my own college isn't tangential to my studies, it *is my studies*. It's central to the nature and intent of my practice, bound up in my identity, and core to my consciousness as a Black person operating in a white-run institution, city, and nation. Anti-racism *is my practice*.

So, amid the uncertainty this experience stirred up in me, I settled quickly, certainly and without much angst into an affirmation that my next project and the projects after that would be Black and personal without apology. This was less about making an act of resistance, and more of a means of way-finding through my practice. That moment, and my graduate experience more broadly, helped me grasp a fuller view of my positionality as a researcher and my placement within the hierarchy of an institution so white and commercial and neoliberal that to utter "the Antiracist Classroom" out loud still makes people on campus just as uncomfortable as acknowledging the racist frameworks, actions, and pedagogies that led us to start the group in the first place.

## lessons on becoming undisciplined

Mariah Webber

morph into a **white** *critical*  
race scholar.

scrub the Black **off your skin.**  
lick a singular page of Black discourse.  
soak in **bleach.**  
talk yo shit.  
speak over Black bodies in your new **mayo** skin.  
nest in the Black studies department. get comfy.  
why stop there?  
wield the word NIGGER at your Black students.  
use generational pain as a teaching moment.  
retire on the money you earned in your **alabaster abode.**  
retire on the Black bodies you stepped over.  
for what could be more undisciplined than a **white critical race** scholar?



Timnit Kefela, *The Toolkit*, 2018. Rubber cut block print on card paper, acrylic ink, 7.4 in x 5.5 in. Courtesy of the artist.



## The Toolkit

Timnit Kefela

*“Raising Black children—female and male—in the mouth of a racist, sexist, suicidal dragon is perilous and chancy. **If they cannot love and resist at the same time, they probably will not survive...**This is what mothers teach – love, survival...”*  
— Audre Lorde, “Man Child” (1984)

The existence of black bodies in the academy is synonymous to resistance. We become all root and no flower, as the action of being dances on the edge of sacrifice. Echoing Audre Lorde’s sentiments in “Man Child”, we are entitled to our softness, as depicted by the flower that is mostly thornless, and our resistance as symbolized by the dagger. This toolkit highlights the dichotomy I view as necessary for survivorship in the seemingly “apolitical” world of science (and the academy as a whole).

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*I would like to acknowledge the often forgotten individuals and labor force (UC Service Workers) who ensure that our spaces are conducive for our thinking and questions to happen. We see you and are thankful for you. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the community that reminds me to reflect and be gentle enough to express myself when I desperately want to harden.*

## Three Poems

Aliyah Abu-Hazeem

*For Mama Jessie. I carry your spirit with me every day as if it were an appendage to my soul. I write for and through you.*

---

### Curls

How sweet it is to be loved by you.  
My curls know no bounds.  
They fall in and out of place so effortlessly.  
Bouncing freely; my first model of independence  
Expanding like chests exhaling past mistakes, giving meaning and purpose to  
existing.  
They say, "It's just hair, it will grow back."  
Dismembered and shackled limbs don't just grow back.  
These curls are a reminder.

I remember that white creamy stuff; cool to the touch but burned the hell out of  
my scalp.  
A perm.  
I shudder at the thought.  
No one said it would be permanent.  
Everlasting damage.  
Where have my curls gone?  
Gone like the ancestors who fought for me to walk in my truth freely, but I hid this  
truth like it was a lie or something to be concealed.  
I couldn't love me, so I couldn't love them.  
The Blackest thing about me wasn't worth my love?  
I permed away my tresses and traded them in for a mane that was "too thick" to  
ever be bone straight.  
The irony.

There's ice-cold comfort in my friends remarking, "Has your hair grown? It looks  
longer."  
The caucasity.  
Curls have life.  
Their form is endless.  
They shrink and become tight ringlets, but they also extend to create a loose  
wave.  
But when I rock my wash-n-go, I hear "Oh wait, it still looks like you cut it!"

Isn't it funny how people need to feel validated in the opinion that they've made up about you?

An opinion not grounded in facts, but a lack of understanding that MY hair and THEIR hair will never coexist in the same conversation about hair-care maintenance, products used, or options for styling.

I co-wash my hair every two-three weeks depending on the level of build-up.

I use Shea Moisture's deep conditioner intermittently.

And I rock my twist out, which lasts for several days if I sleep with a bonnet on.

"You don't wash your hair every day? That's gross."

You know what's gross?

White entitlement.

The privilege you have and use to judge my hair as if it is anything but luxurious and uninhibited.

Eventually, my hair will grow back.

It's taking longer than expected, but so did slavery.

My ancestors waited 246 years, so I can be patient.

Hell, neoslavery is still institutionalized, so I can REALLY be patient.

My hair is in that awkward not-too-short-but-not-where-I-want-it-to-be phase and these same friends taunt me by saying, "Your curls are so cute! You should wear your hair like that more often."

Fuck you.

My curls are beautiful.

They are my own.

I let you take them from me once, but never again.

You've already taken enough.

Leave me with what little I have left that hasn't been coopted.

My hair, like, my attitude, is undisciplined.

It will not conform to Eurocentric beauty standards that weren't made with people like me in mind.

My hair will always be a radical reclamation of power because, despite what you believe, I AM POWERFUL.

My curls are powerful.

## Time Warp

As I sit, motionless, I am reminded that this world was not made for me.  
This thought came to me in stillness.  
My thoughts are not my own.  
Time is of nothing but if not the essence, though time still ain't free, especially if  
it's borrowed in exchange for my soul.  
Is this what existentialism feels like?

Can I afford the cost of time? Reflections of my childhood infiltrate my mind like  
colonizers terrorizing land that is not their own.  
How convenient.  
I'll never be able to buy time because I am the expense.  
I'm bartering with myself because when I [try to] remember I'm priceless, I feel  
like I'm wallowing in cold comfort.  
Cold like the crossed hands of my beloved kin inside of a pine box because they  
don't get caskets or memorials.

I'm a prisoner of my own thoughts; shackled by my innermost inhibitions.  
I am but a figment of my own imagination, though I remain part of an active  
collective of world reimagers.  
These visions allow me to see vibrant colors against a Black and white backdrop  
like bright red; the blood of my ancestors that drips off of white daggers.  
The blade is sharp.

I lose track of time; nothing feels real, but then again, what is real?  
Even reality is socially constructed.  
There's that existential crisis again!  
Is it 2019 or 1619?

I'm transported through time.  
I sit in the house and reflect.  
Time stands still like Black bodies told to stand down while white bodies are told  
to "stand their ground."  
I fade to black.  
Is this the sunken place?

I drink the red Kool-Aid.  
Is this what blood tastes like?  
Why does it glide down my throat with ease?

I fall backwards, eyes closed.

Trapped in a time warp, I travel with the intent to locate boundaries that have been blurred like misunderstanding “No” as consent. “Yes, I said NO” and “No, I do not mean, Yes!”

My parents could not protect me, and school could not prepare for the unwritten truth concealed behind the historical lies.

What if I had been a slave?

Am I not one presently?

My fair skin gifts me VIP access to the master’s suite right on the top bunk.

How much does liberation cost?

[faint whispers] Your soul.

I sit outside of the house.

Blood drips from my thighs.

I rally up enough chicken change to buy my freedom, but 45 reminds me that it isn’t for sale.

Well, isn’t it ironic that as soon as I remember my worth, I neglect to recall that capitalists, like puppeteers, control my purse strings.

And I know that I am nothing but a commodity.

I am the expense.

I am exploitable.

I have been exploited.

Pain and fear run as deep as those lakes that hide bodies of still-missing children.

I suddenly remember that which I so desperately wanted to forget, but time would not let me.

Time was never really on my side.

Time can be so cruel.

My thoughts are flooded.

It’s hard to (re)imagine a reality where my life matters.

Even capital-T truth is subjective and subject to the historical lies.

What about my truth?

I fear I don’t know what is true.

I feel so desperately out of touch with reality as I try to determine fact from fake news.

What’s real are these feelings: the overwhelming melancholy.

I’m having an out-of-body experience.

My soul is leaving my body and entering another.

Both bodies are brown.

They say, “God doesn’t make mistakes.”

I don’t remember my former life.

Did it really happen?

How will I ever know?

Was it not a life well lived?  
I cannot say for certain, but I know my skin is darker, more luxurious.  
My melanin is poppin'.  
I'm comfortable in my Blackness.  
As comfortable as shoes that are a half size too small.  
Is it because I left the house?  
This is what guilt tastes like.

Will I have to wait another lifetime to remember where I've been or who I am?  
When will I recall the things that made me brazenly me?  
Maybe when I breathe new life into this battered, bruised, lifeless shell of  
existence.  
Next lifetime will be better as I'll be farther away from deception and false  
impressions.  
I promise, I will revel in my truth and it will be glorious.

## Unapologetic

The prefix un means not.

It is used to give negative or opposite force in adjectives and their derivative adverbs and nouns.

Or so says dictionary.com.

But un is also a homograph; a double entendre.

The prefix un has been consistently used by well-meaning white liberals as a convenient placeholder; a marker that differentiates the worthwhile from the undeserving.

Like the unavoidable racialized underpinnings of the words: uncouth, unkempt, and unabashed.

It's funny how the same prefix can reckon with several competing meanings and user intentions.

For example, Black people are uncivilized, unengaged, and unemployable.

Like when a Black person doesn't get the job, "they're unqualified."

But when a white person gets the promotion, "they're unparalleled."

Language is woefully insidious.

Those who have access to the master's toolkit may be well aware, but those at the margins remain uninformed.

And yet, Black people manage to remain unbothered, undefeated, and unafraid.

Don't believe the rumors and fake news that will try to convince you otherwise.

The constant deceptive narratives that endorse willful ignorance and embrace an uncritical tolerance of white supremacy and Black subjugation.

Yes, lowercase-w white and capital-B Black.

Language, especially the reclamation of its expressive abilities, is powerful.

Like, reminding yourself that Black people are unashamed, unfettered, and unsurpassed.

Most importantly, Black people are unapologetically, and unequivocally, Black.

## For Black Girls Considering Graduate School: Things I Wish I Knew Before Pursuing a Ph.D.

Taylor M. Jackson

Hey girl,

If you're reading this then you're probably considering if grad school is right for you. I wrote you this letter to impart some wisdom I wish I had known before starting my Ph.D. program. Before I begin, I just want you to know that:

You are enough. You are brilliant in your own right. Your opinions, your voice, and your ideas are valid. You do not have to bend for anyone. Be everything you are, all the time.

Now that we've established the ground rules, let's talk!

*I wish I would've known to take up as much space as possible.* To voice my opinions without fear of making White people in the room uncomfortable. To advocate for my ideas and my research, even when others dismissed my knowledge as unscholarly or trivial. Looking back, I felt powerless attempting to navigate the classroom and power dynamics of my department. I spent way too much time worried about what my peers, professors, and those praying on my downfall thought about me. I questioned whether speaking up in class would be used against me. Worried I didn't know enough Durkheim or Foucault to keep up with my peers. Nervous that bringing race into every discussion would ruffle too many feathers. Now, I realize that not speaking up did not help me in any way. As Audre Lorde says, "Your silence will not protect you." It did not bring more opportunities, funding, or protection. Even if your voice shakes, even if you stumble on your words, use your voice. What you have to say is valuable, it holds weight, and people need to hear it. Always be unapologetically you. This may look different for different people. For me, it was getting involved in a leadership position and advocating for issues that mattered to me. It was also not worrying about how my tone of voice, the way I dressed, the examples I used in class, or the way I wore my hair make me afraid of existing in this space. You might not be in an environment where it is safe for you to express yourself in these ways, but I urge you to find ways that bring you comfort and deter you from shrinking or dimming your light.



*I wish I would've known that survival is the minimum.* So many seminars, trainings, and workshops I attended focused on surviving graduate school. While I know that surviving as a Black woman is an act of resistance in itself, I want more than that now. I want to thrive. Graduate school was not designed with me in mind, so the environment is unwelcoming and sometimes downright toxic. I quickly learned this when I entered my TA supervisor's office my very first semester. He said, "You're not who I was expecting." I soon began to realize these interactions would become common. Whether it be a prestigious professor being shocked that I was so well prepared and organized during our meetings, to other faculty members refusing to acknowledge my presence in elevators or hallways I walked every day. Graduate school is not worth your mental, physical, or emotional health. It is not worth your sense of self either. I have missed birthdays, the birth of my godson, family gatherings, funerals, and precious moments with the people I love the most. Be prepared to sacrifice, but do not allow your life to stand still. Always take time to pour into yourself. Live, sis! The world will not stop for your degree, and you never want to look up from your work and realize that you have missed out on years of your life to study or work. You will never get this time back, so make sure that you continue to do the things that bring you peace and joy. This is why I want you to thrive. Graduate school does not have to be a period marked by struggle and hardship. For many of us, it is, but my hope for you is that you will find ways to use your lived experiences to your advantage. To find your voice and speak openly about what matters to you inside and outside of the ivory tower. I hope that graduate school is a transformative experience that puts what truly matters in perspective.

*I wish I would've known that it's okay to not have it all together.* It's perfectly fine to have moments where you feel like this is not something you want to do. Always take time to re-evaluate how you're feeling. Your peers will view you as competition, and at times, they will question your very existence in "their" space. Your advisors will stare at your hair during meetings instead of looking into your eyes. Your professors will try and direct you to topics that make them feel more comfortable. Your research will not always be appreciated, and you will most likely have to advocate for the communities you aim to highlight and uplift. You might be the first person in your family to go to graduate school, and there will be a disconnect trying to explain to your family exactly what you're going through. So, make sure you establish community with people who do get it. No one can get through graduate school alone. Ask for help if you need it. This might be people outside of your program, people at other institutions, or a previous support system. You will need to lean on others when things get tough. I cannot put into words how instrumental my support system has been for my graduate school experience. Whether that be re-creating a wine down we saw in *Insecure*, to cooking soul food on a Sunday, we made it a point to love on each other. Although peer support is wonderful, some of us need a little extra help. If you're able to, consider therapy. Graduate students often experience anxiety and depression due to social isolation and heavy workloads. This is only amplified as a Black woman. There is no shame in seeking a professional to develop healthy coping skills. In fact, your performance will probably improve, and it will help you not only survive, but thrive. I can only imagine how my experience would be different had I started seeking help sooner.

*I wish I would've known to celebrate every single one of my accomplishments.* Flex on them! Our fields are filled with so much rejection that you must be proud of yourself every step of the way. I have celebrated everything from passing my qualifying exam, to getting through the end of the week. People are going to ask you how long until you graduate, and some might question why you're even in graduate school to begin with. It is crucial to stay true to your own goals and commitment. There is no shame in taking some time to rest, re-charge, and remind yourself why you embarked on this journey. My advice is to be happy in those moments and run your own race. Your path might look different than the person next to you, and that is perfectly fine. There is enough room for us all to succeed in whatever space we decide.

This letter is not to discourage you. WE NEED SCHOLARS LIKE YOU! You are capable, competent, and brilliant. You can do this work, and you can do it well. I know you will accomplish things that will help society understand the wealth of knowledge that Black women possess. Our history. Our struggle. Our resistance. Our diversity. All of the complexities that make Black women absolutely incredible. I know you have that in you, and when it gets hard, I hope that you look back on this letter and know that you have everything within you to make it through. And if for whatever reason you decide this is not for you, you can do amazing work somewhere else. Do what makes you happy, because at the end of the day your peace is the most important thing.

I am rooting for you, I believe in you, and I am forever grateful to be a Black woman, who gets to walk the Earth with dope Black women like you.

Love, Taylor

## Night Scholar Tales

Camille Dantzler

Laptop down, pussy poppin'  
Melanin gravitated  
Toasting center, fury, and passion

## “Yo girl” Said

Camille Dantzler

...in my office hours for the A  
...in my email for extra credit  
...in my drunk rant to you in a banana costume on campus  
...in my slip up when I called you nigger at the door, “it’s an inside joke”  
...in my soliloquy about how I don’t believe in “isms” in the world  
...in my list of travel countries I skipped all of Africa because I read “Heart of  
Darkness” by Joseph Conrad and it’s “scary”  
...in my conference call to you where I have the chair and administrator of the  
department ask for your work to assist me  
...in my head

## Desire and Transnational Solidarity within the Black Queer Diaspora

Joshua Reason

I was excited about the prospects of being single in Brazil. As with most 20-somethings attempting to have an active “dating” life, I juggled between a few apps until I found someone who caught my eye: a 6’ 3” Black *carioca*<sup>1</sup> who moved to São Paulo to study theater. After messaging back and forth for a few days, we decided to get together for drinks on my last night in São Paulo. He picked me up in front of my hotel, wearing a red Wonder Woman shirt and blue jeans (which I found extremely attractive, given my love of superheroes). After walking on Avenida Paulista for a while, we got a few beers at an outdoor bar in front of the São Paulo Museum of Art.

Aside from the general euphoria of being out on a date, the pleasure of getting to know someone new, the anticipation of where the night will take you, I was drawn to how caring, insightful, and funny he was; he brought out the joy in everyone he interacted with, including myself. It was the first time in a while that I had been with someone who made me feel protected: his stature, jocular tone of voice, and eagerness to give me advice for the rest of my time in Brazil made him feel like home. After talking for two hours and finishing our beers (and I don’t even like beer, so you know I was truly into him), we walked behind the São Paulo Museum of Art to sit down on a cement stairway leading to another bar. When I looked around and saw queer couples all around us, I understood why he had brought me there...

Unfortunately, it had been raining earlier that day. He sat down and ended up getting wet, which gave us both a good laugh. Since his plan had failed, we walked back on Avenida Paulista towards my hotel, and I invited him up to my room. After closing the door, he pulled me closer, with the right balance of force and affection, and put his lips on mine. I won’t go into the physical details of what proceeded, but as he pinned me down on the bed, erasing all distance between us, he said something that will always stick with me:

*“Você tem cheiro de Americano”* (You smell like an American)<sup>2</sup>

I was so wrapped up in the moment that I tucked what he said to the corner of my mind. During a brief break in our intimacy, he started to ask me questions about whether or not I had slept with a Brazilian before, for fear that he was, to use his own words, just my *amante latino*. Once I told him that I had not, and that I would never reduce him to a “Latin lover,” we both felt more at ease. *Maybe he was just caught up in the moment too*, I thought to myself. Aside from not understanding what his

comment could possibly mean, I believed that his anxieties around being fetishized would deter him from fetishizing me. But as we continued to cuddle in my tiny hotel bed, he jokingly recited the lyrics to a well-known MPB<sup>3</sup> song:

*Eu sou um preto norte-americano forte* (I am a strong Black American)

*Com um brinco de ouro na orelha* (With a gold earring on one ear)

I can't remember the exact words that he said after reciting these lyrics, but they implied that I was the man from the song. I was his Black American fantasy. Despite not having a gold earring, I am tall, somewhat strong, and from the United States. More than anger, confusion and arousal rose to the surface. Although I couldn't fathom why he would view me in a way that was so contrary to my character, the idea of representing something that I am not was oddly appealing. As such, I rode the wave of arousal and continued having sex with him.

\* \* \*

Black scholars who do Black work often reflect on how our bodies are embedded in multiple systems of power and privilege. However, as a Black queer researcher who does international fieldwork in the predominately-Black city of Salvador da Bahia, I often take for granted how my body has come to represent different (oftentimes contradictory) forms of power and privilege than those in the United States. Those relations became clear in this moment of fetish: my Black Americanness was read in ways that I had never anticipated, especially by another Black queer body who possessed the same fears around being reduced to something less than (or rather, different than) who he truly was.

While we ended up developing a loving relationship, the question of nationality continued to loom over us. I quickly learned that my sexual value laid solely in his idealization of Black Americanness. This became most apparent with regards to language. Every time I would make a mistake in Portuguese, he would say, *Promete que quando você aprende como falar melhor, ainda vai fazer erros para mim* (Promise that when you speak Portuguese better, you will still make mistakes for me). He even went so far as to mention, repeatedly, that he wanted to make a theater sketch based on me and my American accent. From finding the errors in my Portuguese sexy, to asking me to curse at him in English during our future sexual encounters (which never came to be), he constantly exerted his control over language and what it meant within the context of our relationship.

In the midst of these demands, however, was his not-so-hidden disdain for the United States. Donald Trump, capitalism, and other manifestations of U.S. imperialism would regularly come up during our phone conversations. While I rarely disagreed with him, mostly clarifying the space Black Americans occupy in our current sociopolitical climate, he would often speak to me in an accusatory tone. At first, I couldn't make sense of why someone would simultaneously fetishize and loathe my Americanness; my Blackness and lack of personal wealth diminishes the potential social capital to be gained from being in proximity to an American. But after sitting with this discomfort, I turned back to *The Color of Kink* by Ariane Cruz. While Black women's BDSM performance has no direct connection to my situation, her

analysis of race play and revenge helped me contextualize my experience with this guy that I met in São Paulo.

By fucking me, he fulfilled two sexual fantasies: 1) the pornographic idolization of Black male bodies (homothug, BBC, etc.) and 2) enacting revenge for the neocolonialist and imperialist practices of the United States. This is not to say that he abused me. While I did not understand all that I was being made to represent during our moment of intimacy, I do not regret the sex we had, nor do I take back what I said about being aroused by his idealization of me. I am, however, disheartened by the larger implications of this realization. Our relationship forced me to unlearn something that I should have never assumed in the first place: not every Black queer person is home. Despite having similar experiences and politics regarding the Black queer community, his anxieties around Americanness positioned me as a potential purveyor of violence, perpetuating a fetish (*nation play*, perhaps?) that I no longer found attractive or fulfilling.

In thinking about what it means to “become undisciplined” in relation to the academy, I was immediately brought back to this prelude to my fieldwork. While the man described did not participate in my research, I still felt uneasy about sharing this moment of intimacy. Even though my research explores how Black queer and trans lives are mapped onto the urban landscape via notions of desire, I struggle to write myself into those relations. Doing so requires that I acknowledge myself as an active participant in the economies of sex and sexuality within the field, a practice that remains taboo in most academic disciplines. Even if I am not having or seeking out sex, I am constantly being read in sexualized ways. Countless times during my fieldwork, I was assumed to be the partner of whichever friend happened to be at my side, as if I could only be legible to others if I was sexually accounted for. To desexualize myself as a researcher is to miss out on the pleasures, frustrations, stresses, and subtleties that come with being in community with other Black queer and trans bodies.

Traditional research practices were never designed for Black queer and trans histories to be told. In order to honor the breadth of who we are, we must find ways to reshape the normative, sterile structures of the academy. By renegotiating the ethical boundaries of sex as it relates to fieldwork, we will allow for Black queer researchers to turn moments of intimacy into moments of possibility, promoting an open dialogue around sex and sexuality within the academy that centers care, consent and community in the production of knowledge.

## Notes

- 1 Carioca is the name used from people from Rio de Janeiro.
- 2 While there is a lot of tension (and rightfully so) around the use of “American” in reference to people from the United States, I opt to use “American” throughout this essay. In part for readability, but also because I am often referred to as such within Brazil.
- 3 MPB is the shorthand for *Música Popular Brasileira* (Brazilian Popular Music), a post-bossa nova musical movement that is marked by artists such as Chico Buarque, Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, and Elis Regina.

## Lemonade

Y. Norris

*"Take one pint of water, add a half pound of sugar, the juice of eight lemons, the zest of half lemon. Pour the water into one, then to another several times. Strain through a clean napkin. Grandmother. The alchemist. You spun gold out of this hard life. Conjured beauty from the things left behind. Found healing where it did not live. Discovered the antidote in your own kitchen. Broke the curse with your own two hands. You past these instructions down to your daughter, who then passed them down to her daughter."*

*Lemonade*, a visual album, released by Beyoncé has presented an opportunity to examine not only the black woman's experience but to also realize the ways in which ideology can operate within various settings. I will argue that Beyoncé, through her artistic expression, attempts to challenge the dominant ideology while also allowing her work to exist as a call to action.

It is essential to describe art (i.e. any form of artistic expression: music, movies, paintings, poetry, etc.) in the context of capitalism and ideological hegemony, using a historical materialist analysis. While it may be inaccurate to say that art is a tool, and thus a force of production, I would argue that art works within the same framework from which the media operates, as in the way it produces, reinforces and reproduces the ideology of the dominant class in order to maintain hierarchy and overall existence of the capitalist mode of production. Historically, theorists and scholars have acknowledged the benefits of controlling art within society; theoretically, it has been argued that controlling the knowledge of the masses is necessary for social order, amongst other things. Any accumulation of knowledge that can lead to criticism of any mode of production, should be suppressed. Art holds a power of expression, not as deep or as strong, but similar to language, in that it communicates certain ideas, perspectives, analysis', etc. The necessity to control art, then, works in the same way theorists and scholars have come to understand the importance of language, and thus media in maintaining hierarchies of the social, political and economic structures, or the superstructure. It follows that in the same way throughout history, that language and media can be used by subordinate or oppressed groups (but still within the system itself), art can act as a medium for expression and a way to challenge the dominant ideology pertaining to any area of society. I argue that Beyoncé uses her art, to do just that.

*Lemonade* uses a combination of visual, musical and verbal communication to describe the experience of the intersectionality that is black womanhood. While Beyoncé does not recognize or acknowledge the ways in which these oppressions operate within the superstructure or how they have to come exist, she attempts to challenge the images of and public knowledge around black womanhood, i.e. the dominant ideology that contributes to these oppressions. This is apparent throughout the production in the ways in which various aspects are presented. For example, there is a section of the production where a snippet of Malcolm X's speech in LA on May 22, 1962 plays as he asserts repetitive statements regarding the position of black women in America, in the time period, while a series of images of black women flashes on the screen. This is not only a reflection of Beyoncé's incorporation of historically significant events, as a way to ground her work, it is just one way she relates blackness in America, to the experience of the black woman within the same context. This is considered a challenge to the dominant ideology, because it forces the viewer/listener to relate these words with the images of black women they see daily (for some), in opposition to the usual depiction of black womanhood in mainstream media. Another example is Beyoncé's depiction of the police and related imagery. During the song Formation, which many argue is a black woman power/empowerment song,

Beyoncé not only presents herself in various militaristic or rebellious clothing, Beyoncé shows a line of police in full uniform standing on a united front, as a young, black boy dances in front of them, as if almost to confront them. Immediately following the dance, the boy raises his arms and there is an image of a wall with the words "STOP SHOOTING US" spray painted. While one could argue she understands that police are agents of the capitalist system and work to maintain its legitimacy, it is more apparent that Beyoncé understands power in visual and musical art to express the concerns of any marginalized group, and by doing so ultimately creates discourse and challenges any previous assertions of, in this case, black womanhood.

It is important to address here the ways in which this challenges the dominant ideology. Blackness and womanhood have existed as badges of dishonor throughout American history and in other global contexts. Identifying such oppressions works to the benefit of the capitalist or dominate class, insofar as they operate to maintain the capitalist system by determining the ways in which the worker or proletariat can move throughout society. While I do not think Beyoncé dove as deep into this concept, she understands and does well to describe the situation of black womanhood to assert power where she apparently believes there is none. Any assertion of black womanhood, like *Lemonade* in respect to the current sociopolitical climate, is an act of rebellion in and of itself, because within the capitalist mode of production that have been strategically ignored and removed. Understanding that the emergence of capitalism is directly and dialectically related to white supremacy and patriarchy at its core, it is easy to see the reasoning for the isolation of the black woman from the dominant ideology. Thus, *Lemonade* is controversial, insofar as Beyoncé has allowed her art to extend beyond the agenda regularly perpetuated in media, music, and the social realm.



Ultimately, there is no vision or strategy for change that involves tackling the capitalist mode of production head on, Beyoncé has asserted an age-old idea that reform occurs with economic empowerment. Though she may be only operating on a social awareness conscious level, her work can and will assist in the movement toward revolution, as economic empowerment could be a tool of reform. *Lemonade* is not a critical analysis but a description of the state of black womanhood today by not only addressing the political and social implications on a societal level, but by also musically detailing the experience of black womanhood within the family and throughout relationships. She details the temporal significance of traditions, strength and power in relation to the trajectory of black womanhood, historically. Her work can be seen as a call to action, not in a sociological, historical materialist conception of revolution, but, to at least address on a surface level that an issue exists and reform is necessary. As I mentioned, however, this entire account still works to maintain the capitalist-white supremacist-patriarchy, as she does not acknowledge the necessity to overthrow it; she, in fact, asserts that your “best revenge is your paper,” meaning that she believes oppression can be eliminated within the confines of the system that created it, which is contradictory.

*Lemonade*, as a black woman, seems to be a classic assertion and interpretation that regularly is ignored or suppressed. Beyoncé did well to include several layers of symbolism, not in the symbolic interactionist sense, but more tangible examples of blackness and black womanhood (i.e. all black women throughout the album) that resonated with me. In a society where I have found it necessary to always defend my black womanhood, it was an entirely different feeling to see it visualized and asserted in a way that could connect with those who otherwise may not have access to academic settings or intellectual circles that allow for these types of conversations. Emotional appeal, which is often used by the dominant class to push certain agendas, is what I think makes the piece so interesting; you can feel what Beyoncé is saying musically, especially as it connects to the visual and other verbal communication present.

## **your name is a weapon**

Timnit Kefela

Their tongues unravel  
when they hear my name-

'T's shaken loose, swallowed 'M' and  
'N', with the 'I's remaining in place

sounds resembling gutted  
tangerines, leaving their mouths-  
all rind, no flesh.

## **a mantra of survivorship (honey never rots)**

Timnit Kefela

All of you cannot be fastened  
into a single sentence,  
The adjectives alone drip  
like an overflowing jar of  
honey: viscous, heavy but  
in the sun—a golden light.

## I Can't Feel Anything, I'm Already Dead

Josalynn Smith

It's fast approaching autumn in New York again and that means every Chelsea gallery will have new works to tote. Sikkema Jenkins was probably the luckiest with hosting paintings—perhaps the most important paintings of the 2017 season—by Kara Walker.

I was struck by the [Press Release](#) for Walker's show. I thought it was a lot. But then I read the artist's statement, which follows:

I don't really feel the need to write a statement about a painting show. I know what you all expect from me and I have complied up to a point. But frankly I am tired, tired of standing up, being counted, tired of "having a voice" or worse "being a role model." Tired, true, of being a featured member of my racial group and/or my gender niche. It's too much, and I write this knowing full well that my right, my capacity to live in this Godforsaken country as a (proudly) raced and (urgently) gendered person is under threat by random groups of white (male) supremacist goons who flaunt a kind of patched together notion of race purity with flags and torches and impressive displays of perpetrator-as-victim sociopathy. I roll my eyes, fold my arms and wait. How many ways can a person say racism is the real bread and butter of our American mythology, and in how many ways will the racists among our countrymen act out their Turner Diaries race war fantasy combination Nazi Germany and Antebellum South – states which, incidentally, lost the wars they started, and always will, precisely because there is no way those white racisms can survive the earth without the rest of us types upholding humanity's best, keeping the motor running on civilization, being good, and preserving nature and all the stuff worth working and living for?<sup>1</sup>

If anything ever described what I feel on a daily basis, it's the above.

I'm from St. Louis—a mildly important American city. It's where Ferguson is located. The news tried to spin it like Ferguson was not a part of St. Louis, but it is. Anyway, Fall '14 you could catch me ousting problematics, blocking highways, dodging (rubber) bullets, and outrunning billows of purple smoke and the cuffs of the police. I did not want to be embarrassed when my future students or children asked where I was during this 21st century civil rights movement. I at least wanted to be able to say "I did that for you, so you could have a better life." But now we're at it again.

I'm never surprised anymore. The white people of St. Louis are scared this weekend. Jason Stockley (white), a former St. Louis police officer, shot and killed Anthony Lamar Smith (black) in 2011. There's a slew of incriminating dash-cam footage of what happened and Stockley's DNA is on a firearm found in Smith's car, but Smith's DNA is not. With the introduction of this evidence, Stockley was charged with first-degree murder and armed criminal action in May of 2016. Stockley was acquitted September 15, 2017, of course.

St. Louis's social justice community is protesting because of the decision. City officials escalated the situation by putting snipers on top of downtown high-rises and bringing in the [National Guard](#) troops.<sup>2</sup> They do this every. single. time. us negroes have something to say.

A way to frame the actions of local and federal governments is through afro-pessimism.

Through that lens, black people are already dead—we continue to welcome socially still-born babies into the world each day. The rest of our lives are a kind of “Weekend at Bernie’s” deal. Simply put, the United States was founded upon a binary of black objectivity and white subjectivity. Objects are meant to be used by subjects. This means laws and systems were created for people, for subjects—black people are not subjects in the United States unfortunately, if we were, we wouldn't continue to be quietly exterminated since our use as slaves has come to an end.<sup>3</sup>



Kara Walker, *The (Private) Memorial Garden of Grandison Harris*, 2017. Oil stick and Sumi ink on paper collaged on linen. Diptych, 90 x 144 inches (228.6 x 365.8 cm) overall. Artwork © Kara Walker, courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York.

“The (Private) Memorial Garden of Grandison Harris” by Walker elicits themes that differ from her other paintings in the autumn show. It depicts a black man dragging the corpse of a black woman not to the grave but from it. Walker's paintings speak to a continuity of oppression from antebellum America to the contemporary climate; however, “The (Private) Memorial Garden of Grandison Harris” recalls the one saving grace for black people in this country—a zombie apocalypse.

Hear me out, new laws, amendments, they're just band-aids. What we need is anarchy. Each and every United States Governing system must be destroyed and rebuilt if you ever want a real taste of equality. Now, anarchy is not possible unless another powerful nation backs American rebels and supplies them with weaponry to stand a chance against the United States Army, etc. Obviously, the odds of that happening are slim.

The only way out at this point is disengaging with [capitalism](#).<sup>4</sup> This takes some time and planning, but it's really the only way we can collectively own property and experience something close to [social life](#) as opposed to our current status.<sup>5</sup> Maybe I'd be less tired—emotionally from the daily white nonsense and physically by protests, putting my body on the line to prove “dead people are people too?” I mean white people will probably burn down self-sustaining black controlled communities anyway (e.g. [Black Wall Street](#)<sup>6</sup>), but it's worth another shot. Maybe Cuba or North Korea could back us? Who knows?

Anyway everyone still protesting in St. Louis and across America right now, I'm glad you guys don't feel as dead as I do...yet.

## Notes

- 1 Kara Walker, “Kara Walker. September 7 – October 14, 2017,” Sikkema Jenkins and Co., <https://www.sikkemajenkinsco.com/kara-walker-2017>.
- 2 See Kevin McDermott, “National Guard Troops Were Put on Standby before Stockley Verdict,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 15, 2017, [https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/st-louis-region-on-edge-as-stockley-verdict-looms/article\\_8b978ee9-80d8-5beb-9401-3933653f9b3e.html](https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/st-louis-region-on-edge-as-stockley-verdict-looms/article_8b978ee9-80d8-5beb-9401-3933653f9b3e.html).
- 3 See, however, “Prison Labour Is a Billion-Dollar Industry, with Uncertain Returns for Inmates,” *The Economist*, March 16, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2017/03/16/prison-labour-is-a-billion-dollar-industry-with-uncertain-returns-for-inmates>.
- 4 See Workers International League, “USA: ‘You Can’t Have Capitalism Without Racism,’” *Marxism.com*, August 22, 2014. <http://www.marxist.com/usa-you-cant-have-capitalism-without-racism.htm>.
- 5 See Jared Sexton, “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism,” *InTensions*, no. 5 (2011), <https://www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/pdfs/jaredsextonarticle.pdf>.
- 6 See Josie Pickens, “Black Wall Street and the Destruction of an Institution,” *Ebony*, May 31, 2013, <https://www.ebony.com/black-history/destruction-of-black-wall-street/#axzz4stRcPrE8>.



Tiffany Smith, *Perpetual Tourist*, 2015. Photograph.  
Artwork © Tiffany Smith, courtesy of the artist.



## Musings on Displacement

Tiffany Smith

The elders say, “You can’t know where you’re going unless you know where you’re from...”

The simple question “where are you from?” is a surprisingly complex one for me to answer. What follows is a bit of a mouthful as I reply “Well, my father is from Jamaica, my mother from Trinidad, and I was raised between Nassau and Miami,” glossing over details in an effort to be succinct. If forced to put myself in a box, I imagine it would be brightly colored and emblazoned with flags from a host of island nations, emanating the particular scent of the combination of sand, sea, and sunblock, and labeled “Caribbean-American.” This label may contain the experience of a multi-cultural existence to a pretty little package, but it lacks depth in its inability to accurately describe the inherent duality of the experience.

Before I came to the States, I had no real experience with being viewed as different or cast into the role of “other”. I had no idea that in America I would be told that I “talk funny” or that I have “poofy hair”. I had no real impressions of what life was like in America outside of what I saw in images projected through film, tv, and magazines, or on the few brief dalliances I had with American culture on the mainland during shopping trips to Miami. Still, because I was the only member of my family who held a U.S. passport when the visas my mother, father and brother waited so long for arrived and we were finally able to move to America, I viewed our arrival as a kind of homecoming, assured that I would fit in simply because I was born there.

My early childhood was spent in the Bahamas and my family’s relocation to Miami, FL was a major adjustment for me as I left my island home for the “mainland” at 9 years old. Although Miami’s tropical climate and pervasive Caribbean community helped to ease the transition, the environment coupled with the cultural heritage that my parents ardently preserved within my household made it, in actuality, more difficult to fully identify with and integrate into American culture. My “soul food” was mom’s curry and rice and peas. We played soca and reggae music at family gatherings. Frequent trips back to the islands have continued, since then, to keep me aware of and connected to my island heritage. Surrounded by the people in whom I find strength, inspiration, and a connection to my history, I think of the experience as visiting home.

Jamaicans use the expression “come from foreign” in part, to describe a native who has spent time abroad, returning home with evidence of their life overseas never far behind. When visiting the islands, I am welcomed with the warm and

familiar hospitality that any visitor to the island would encounter. Special trips to the beach and the river are planned as are obligatory outings to dine on jerk chicken or fried fish and visits to family who never cease to marvel at “how much you’ve grown.”

After years of immersion in American culture, I find myself in the precarious position of being slightly foreign in every place I call home. With an awareness of my Caribbean heritage steadily drumming through my American life, I am often hesitant to identify myself as American even though my passport and the life I have built over more than 20 years in the U.S. tell a different tale. When visiting the islands, my accent, attitude, and appearance often immediately identify me as a foreigner. I can blend in seamlessly with other tourists at the pool despite the fact that I am in a place where I feel most at home.

I remember growing up and watching the Miss America and Miss USA pageants, transmitted from abroad onto one of the two local channels on the single family room television of our island home with wonder, naively dreaming of growing up to become an archetype of beauty, poise, and grace. I always scanned the lineup of contestants, searching to find the one who represented a reflection of myself and though I never quite found her, I remained unflinching in my belief that my adult self would be more than capable of elbowing out the competition to win the crown.

I had no concept of how narrow American ideals of beauty were and that the chances of my own ideals of beauty being viewed as typical would be, at the least, a formidable challenge, and at best, an insurmountable goal. Within the social and political climate I entered into, I could never be Miss America. I was ready for America, but she was not ready for me.

So began my ongoing attempt to define an identity that embraces my multicultural upbringing and oscillates between “visitor” and “native” in a battle between the pressure to assimilate and the desire to retain allegiance to specific cultural practices and definitions of beauty.

Sometimes I describe myself as a home grown immigrant, because I may “come from foreign” but I am an island girl at heart.





Tiffany Smith, *Portrait of my Future Self*, 2016. Photograph.  
Artwork © Tiffany Smith, courtesy of the artist.



Tiffany Smith, *Self Portrait as a Sunburned Tourist*, 2016. Photograph.  
Artwork © Tiffany Smith, courtesy of the artist.

## Foreign Land

Tiffany Smith

My island has many names and many roots.  
Floating somewhere between a clear blue sky disrupted by afternoon showers,  
and an ocean floor viewed through the surface of the water,  
It is tethered by currents that bring water pooled in a host of ancestral lands  
to nestle in nebulous caves beneath the perpetual motion of the terrain.

There is another side of paradise that lies in the in between spaces.  
Between gusts of cool breeze that tickle swaying palm leaves,  
Masked by the memory of the scent of sand, and sea, and sunblock,  
There is a longing for the comfort of home that lingers like salt on mouths after  
days at the beach,  
A yearning to be warmed by a native sun and cooled by multi-patterned tile floors  
underneath bare feet,  
To be whole within the pieced together bits  
Like the collection of crystal decanters that line the cabinet at “auntie’s” house.

My island has many names and many roots.  
Sovereign to self,  
I find home within me.

## notes on blackfeministgender

### J. Victorian

before blackfeminist became a region in [ ] mind and a body of texts to return to by name, the way [ ] connected to that sensation, force of creative emergence, was music, that audacious croon slipped clear across [ ] mind and a body, that expression long made crucial site of imagining what might become, how undone [ ] might feel, the pulse of [ ] resonance structured flesh, the tempo of *sonic romantic interiority*, the spill of culture, the body split open, the quiet echoing, the poetic, thrum of the erotic, the

space within seems an important part of whatever [ ] will look like. approaching a sublime form of recognition. becoming dangerously welcome in your own body.

What if gender is blackfeminist. What if gender says nothing. What if surveys asked how you were doing, but recorded no answer. Why have you asked a question you have already sutured the answer to. What if gender is structured by confusion. What if gender is bothered by the drama of it all. What will gender say when it hears you talking shit. Does gender care. Do we care if it cares. Has gender read "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." Does gender read my tweets but not like any of them. Has gender met the binary. Do they still talk. Could we ever start seeing each other. Does gender like what I have done with the place. Does gender trust us enough to come back. Is gender coming back home tonight.

sense out of nonsense / if you can. embrace dissonance, divest / mind the gaps, the body black gender made / not to overlap. the everyday glitches / in the drama. pretend we had a chance.

the pressure of being  
bountifully present sometimes  
too great the fullness is  
unappreciated  
atmosphere is too hot  
too stifling for life  
succor is delicious like none other  
when it comes  
but flowers wilt, so quickly—



Refuse to cede histories of relation to that defensive stance, that counterhistorical reflex that deflects by ignoring the point. Refuse to clap for the disappearing acts. Refuse to socially locate others beyond the bounds of freedom, into the gutter no job kicked out assaulted while walking while expansive while the expanse is outside the preserve where you have made yourself at home, that your forebears maybe built or financed, that maybe your ancestors were labored and killed upon. All this because the [ ] that roam cannot be allowed to encroach on sacred desecrated land.

Imagine [ ] laughing quietly in the pews, whispering to the [ ] sitting next to them. About what? The pastor's ill-fitting suit. The older [ ] complaining of how fast the children have become unbound, like the [ ] voice cracking through the solo. The audacity of them all. But surely they teared up, at least once, at the beauty of the congregation, the force of emotions churning through each key change, and the swelling organs.

Undiscipline was making life. Finding ways to inhabit the [ ] beyond the prescriptions of anti-black, colonial regimes of gendering. That old place where it was not always safe or possible to exist so fully. But then, we would finally cultivate black life at all costs meaning no cost in the end. Honor blacktransexistence in its complexity. Like waves, think through together and break apart, *racialsexualgender*. And un/holy trinities shrouded the water like oil—food or funeral, we could not know until we were brave enough to taste. But blessed were we with blackfeminist communion, the gift of bodies broken out of the hold.

## Notes

*sonic romantic interiority* — from Mark Anthony Neal, keynote lecture at the SSRC–Mellon Mays Graduate Student Summer Conference, June 22, 2017.

*racialsexualgender* — from Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 83. Blackfeminist thinkers have long explored how race, sexuality, and gender are violently intertwined.

## on being in grad school next to the ocean.

megan spencer

there are no words for a wound like this, no language i know. but i trip over posthumanism affect ontology. they tell me to speak in class more. all of these words so bloody, so flavored with conquest. they cut my tongue. i am making a constellation of where it hurts. in a cafe in santa barbara i look for benin on google maps. a white woman touches my hair, i say nothing. if there is a language it is somewhere at the bottom of the atlantic. a woman on the beach tells me salt water turns a body black, she does not say what it does to words. i am looking south at the ocean wondering if there is a way out of despair, but the beach is a graveyard littered with bees, i step around their papery bodies and think how bees are really women who work themselves to death. i am black on land. having been submerged in the space where language falls apart, i am unaccustomed to the earth's cracking throat. how long it has been dry here and how long it will burn. june jordan plays in my head: i am a woman walking alone under a beautiful orange moon. this is what smoke does, rain ash on my braided hair. this is what trauma does, consider the intimacy and violence of keys, between my fingers, wrapped in a closed fist. i watch the sun disappear into the water. illuminating what lives in darkness, the horizon aglow with pink light. for a moment all is silent—the laughter of children, car horns, crashing waves collide in quiet agreement: the ocean blooms at night. every living thing is possible and awake, thundering under self-rupture and against the open earth.

# Collages

Amoni Thompson-Jones



Toni Morrison



Nia Wilson

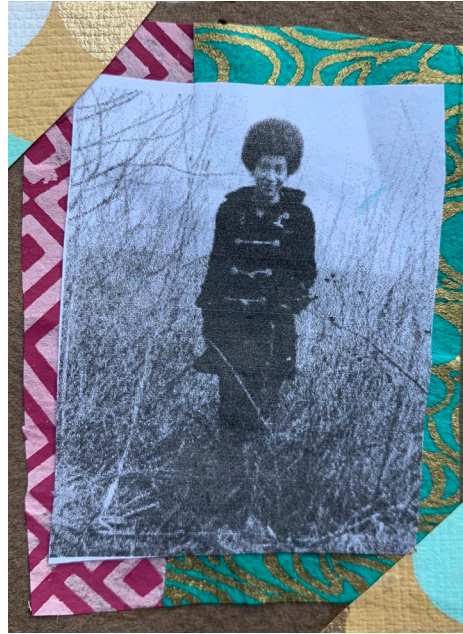


Fannie Lou Hamer





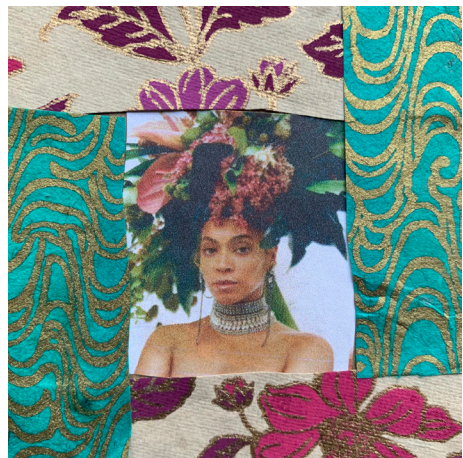
Solange



June Jordan



Kelela



Beyoncé



## contributors

### **Aliyah Abu-Hazeem**

Aliyah. Doctoral student in Sociology at the University of Washington. I am Jessie's granddaughter, Antoinette's daughter, Ashantae's sister, and Alissa's keeper. I come from a long lineage of femme creatives who have instilled in me the import of using art as an outlet to not let my disenchantment with the current sociocultural and political climate stifle me. I turned to poetry at a young age; it is still my favorite form of expression. I remember losing that passion in college and graduate school. The pieces I have submitted are the fruits of my attempt to locate my passion again.

### **Alex Cunningham**

Alex is a Chicago baby whose interdisciplinary straddling guides her throughout the academy. As a doctoral student, her research explores Black women's sexual cultures through burlesque, striptease, and pole dance. In her ample spare time, Alex is a pole dancer and aspiring sexuality educator. She is also a John Money Fellow at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction.

### **Camille Dantzer**

Camille is a doctoral candidate in the Department of African Studies and Research at Howard University. Camille received her Master's degree in African American and African Studies at The Ohio State University (2012) and double Bachelor's degrees in African American and African Diaspora Studies and Psychology from Indiana University-Bloomington (2009). Her research interests include gender studies, African and African Diaspora film and literature, peace and conflict studies, and narratology.

### **Taylor M. Jackson**

Taylor M. Jackson is a doctoral student studying race, gender, work & organizations, and media. She is interested in how Black women use media to engage in forms of self-care. When she's not working, Taylor is watching documentaries or sports, and trying new food.

### **Ciarra Jones**

Ciarra Jones received her Bachelor of Arts degree in American Studies from the University of California Berkeley. Currently, she is a Master of Theological studies candidate at Harvard University studying the intersection of race, religion, and sexuality. You can find her writing on *Huffington Post*, *The Tempest*, *Black Youth Project*, and *Medium*.

### **Timnit Kefela**

Timnit is a doctoral student studying environmental science at UC Santa Barbara where she researches microplastic pollution in terrestrial environments. Her passion for the environment is deliberate and surpasses scientific curiosity where she advocates for communities like her own to be heard and seen in environmental solution-making platforms. Simply, she wants the world to know that the environmental future also belongs to Black and Brown people. Outside of the lab and field, she loves to create prints, poems, and passionfruit flavored anything.

### **Y. Norris**

Yanesia is a graduate student at Howard, in Sociology. Originally from Charlotte, North Carolina, she completed her BA in Political Science with a minor in Philosophy at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA. Most recently, she has worked as an educator, mentor and coach. Her research interests broadly include the intersection of race, gender and education, the sociology of education, and higher education access for students of color.

### **A. Pierce**

AP is an aggressive crafter, a pushover cat parent, and a graduate student in feminist studies at UC Santa Barbara. She aims to utilize her obsessive consumption of various media academically, and much of her current research deals with comics and media studies, anti-work politics, and the labor of producing gender.

### **Joshua Reason**

I'm a Black queer graduate student from the Bay Area. My current research, based in Salvador da Bahia, considers how desire is leveraged to write Black queer and trans bodies into/out of the past, present and future of the city. During my master's fieldwork, I interviewed 40 Black queer and trans Brazilians and co-created a digital map of the spaces where they feel most (un)comfortable with their race, gender, and sexuality. Outside of my work, I'm an avid gaymer, reader, filmgoer and K-Pop fan.

### **Josalynn Smith**

Filmmaker and writer, Josalynn Smith has had films in St. Louis International Film Festival and Queer Fest St. Louis. Smith is a recipient of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's Production Grant for her thesis film *Something in the Water* (2019). Additionally, Smith is the recipient of the Jesse Thompkins III Screenwriting Award from Columbia University, and more recently, a finalist for SFFILM's Alfred P. Sloan Fellowship for her feature script. She holds an MFA from Columbia University and a BA from Washington University in St. Louis.

### **Tiffany Smith**

Tiffany Smith is an interdisciplinary artist from the Caribbean diaspora who works with photography, video, installation, and design to create photographic portraits, site responsive installations, user engaged experiences, and assemblages focused on identity, representation, cultural ambiguity, and displacement. Smith's practice centers on what forms and defines communities of people color, in particular; how they are identified and represented, and how they endure. Smith received a BFA in Photography from S.C.A.D. and an MFA in Photo/Video from SVA, NY. She is currently based in Brooklyn, NY.

**megan spencer**

megan is a black queer feminist interested in black and native relationality, land and healing, and black feminism as a tradition of ecological care amid various forms of state violence. she is a phd student in feminist studies at uc santa barbara, a childcare worker, and a painter.

**Amoni Thompson-Jones**

Amoni Thompson-Jones is a poet and Black girl aficionado. She has the honor of calling Lumberton, North Carolina her home. She is currently a PhD student in the Feminist Studies program at UC Santa Barbara. She completed her BA in Comparative Women's Studies with a minor in Creative Writing at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA. Her research interests broadly include Black girlhood, cultural ethnography, sexuality, and popular culture. She has read her work at the Decatur Book Festival in Atlanta, GA and The Free Black Women's Library Launch Party in Los Angeles, CA. Her poetry covers topics of race, Black feminism, Black girlhood, and the Black South. Her work has been published on *The Feminist Wire* along with a forthcoming article in a special collection called *The Black Girlhood Studies Collection: Imagining Worlds for Black Girls* published by the Canadian Scholars/Women's Press.

**J. Victorian**

Victorian is an amateur gardener, casual gamer, constant eater, occasional baker, hopeless romantic, Beyoncé *HOMΣCØMING* audience member in asbentia, and a PhD student in feminist studies at UC Santa Barbara. They nerd out over black sexual and gender politics, especially tensions between punishment, pleasure, and political possibility. Their current research explores non/monogamy and racial-sexual regulation, aiming to build toward more blackqueerfeminist futures of black intimacy.

**Mariah Webber**

Mariah Webber, M.A., is a second-year doctoral student of Feminist Studies and Eugene Cota-Robles Fellow at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Her research focuses on eroticism as a site for healing and resistance for Black women. Her current work studies musical artists in the contemporary Southern U.S. and the Black women consumers of their art. She chooses the South, in particular, to look at it as a place of curation and a well-spring of valid and expansive imagination, as opposed to the stereotypes of the South as rural and constrictive.

**Lauren Williams**

Lauren is a designer, researcher, and writer who works with visual and interactive media to understand, critique, and reimagine the ways in which social and economic systems distribute and exercise power. Her work seeks to expose and unsettle power and often prioritizes engaging people through design in service of imagining and manifesting a more equitable present and future. Lately, much of her work revolves around Blackness, identity, bodiliness, and social fictions and examines the ways in which racism is felt, embodied, and embedded into institutions. She graduated with her MFA in Media Design Practices from ArtCenter College of Design and now teaches at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit.

